Claims

[c1]   1. A method for tracing an e-mail message comprising the steps of:

        providing a server able to communicate with a first computer system from which a first e-mail message is sent by a sender and with a second computer system from which said first e-mail message is received by a recipient.

        receiving said first e-mail message sent by said sender for said recipient;

        sending a second e-mail message to said recipient;

        detecting when said recipient opens said second e-mail message; and

        informing said sender that said recipient has opened said second e-mail message.

[c2]   2. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of modifying said first e-mail message to create said second e-mail message.

[c3]   3. The method of claim 2 wherein said modification causes said second computer system to search for a file on said server when said recipient opens said second e-mail message.

[c4]   4. The method of claim 3 wherein said modification comprises the steps of:

        converting said first e-mail message to HTML format; and

        adding additional HTML code to said first e-mail message.

[c5]   5. The method of claim 4 wherein said additional HTML code is an <IMG> command.

[c6]   6. The method of claim 5 wherein said <IMG> command causes said second computer system to execute a script on said server.

[c7]   7. The method of claim 6 further comprising the steps of:

        detecting the request from said second computer system for said script; and

        using said request as an indication that said recipient has opened said second e-mail message.

[c8]   8. The method of claim 5 wherein said <IMG> command causes said second computer system to search for an image file on said server, further comprising the steps of:

detecting the request from said second computer system for said image file;

using said request as an indication that said recipient has opened said second e-mail message; and

sending a dummy image file to said second computer system in response to said request.

[c9]   9. The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of:

storing on said server the e-mail address of said sender of said first e-mail message;

creating a unique identification code;

associating said unique identification code with said e-mail address of said sender; and

including said unique identification code with said second e-mail message.

[c10]   10. The method of claim 9 wherein said detecting step further comprises the step of waiting to receive a request from said second computer system , said request in some way containing said unique identification code

[c11]   11. The method of claim 10 further comprising the steps of:

retrieving said sender's e-mail address through said association with said received unique identification code; and

informing said sender that said recipient has opened said second e-mail message.

[c12]   12. The method of claim 1 wherein said informing step comprises the step of sending a third e-mail message to said sender.

[c13]   13. The method of claim 12 wherein said third e-mail message includes the date and time that said recipient opened said second e-mail message.

[c14]   14. The method of claim 1 wherein said informing step comprises the step of posting a notification on a web site accessible to said sender.

[c15]   15. The method of claim 14 wherein said posting includes the date and time that said recipient opened said second e-mail message.

[c16]   16. The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of:
             storing said first e-mail message on said server; and
             creating said second e-mail message, said second e-mail message containing a link to said stored first e-mail message.

[c17]   17. The method of claim 16 wherein said second e-mail message contains instructions for said recipient to access said stored first e-mail message by selecting said included link.

[c18]   18. The method of claim 17 further comprising the steps of:
             detecting when said stored first e-mail message is requested by said second computer system; and
             using said request as an indication that said recipient has opened said second e-mail message.

[c19]   19. The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of:
             storing said first e-mail message on said server; and
             creating said second e-mail message, said second e-mail message containing an embedding call to said stored first e-mail message, such that said first e-mail message is automatically displayed as an embedded document in said second e-mail message when said recipient opens said second e-mail message.

[c20]   20. The method of claim 19 further comprising the steps of:
             detecting when said stored first e-mail message is requested by said second computer system; and
             using said request as an indication that said recipient has opened said second e-mail message.

[c21]   21. A method for tracing an e-mail message comprising the steps of:

providing a server having an interface accessible as a web page;

allowing a sender of an e-mail message to access said server via said

interface to compose a first e-mail message for a recipient on a

computer system with which said server is able to communicate;

sending a second e-mail message to said recipient;

detecting when said recipient opens said second e-mail message; and

informing said sender that said recipient has opened said second e-

mail message.

[c22]   22. The method of claim 21 further comprising the step of creating said

second e-mail message, said second e-mail message containing said first e-

mail message plus additional HTML code

[c23]   23. The method of claim 22 wherein said additional HTML code causes the

recipient's computer system to search for a file on said server when said

recipient opens said second e-mail message.

[c24]   24. The method of claim 23 wherein said additional HTML code is an <IMG>

command.

[c25]   25. The method of claim 23 further comprising the steps of:

detecting attempts by said recipient's computer system to request said

file on said server; and

using said request as an indication that said recipient has opened said

second e-mail message.

[c26]   26. The method of claim 21 further comprising the steps of:

storing said first e-mail message on said server; and

creating said second e-mail message, said second e-mail message

containing a link to said stored first e-mail message.

[c27]   27. The method of claim 26 wherein said second e-mail message contains

instructions for said recipient to access said stored first e-mail message by

selecting said included link.

[c28]   28. The method of claim 27 further comprising the steps of:

        detecting when said stored first e-mail message is requested by said
        second computer system; and
        using said request as an indication that said recipient has opened said
        second e-mail message.

[c29]   29. The method of claim 21 further comprising the steps of:

        storing said first e-mail message on said server; and
        creating said second e-mail message, said second e-mail message
        containing an embedding call to said stored first e-mail message, such
        that said first e-mail message is automatically displayed as an
        embedded document in said second e-mail message when said
        recipient opens said second e-mail message.

[c30]   30. The method of claim 29 further comprising the steps of:

        detecting when said stored first e-mail message is requested by said
        second computer system; and
        using said request as an indication that said recipient has opened said
        second e-mail message.